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FÜRBRECHEN :

WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE 105-14
(WILMANNS²).

In this well known *Spruch*, the poet champions the cause of the Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia. In the face of the accusations of the latter's enemies and quite regardless of the double-handed nature of the political game played by Hermann in his attitude to the imperial throne, Walther here urges upon Otto's attention the fairness of treatment accorded by Hermann to his imperial opponent. For the Thuringian fights in the open. He is no coward. *Die zagen truogen stillen rât: Sie swuoren hie, sie swuoren dort und pruoften ungetriuwen mort.*

In view of Walther's enthusiastic defense of Hermann the meaning of the first three lines of this *Spruch*, which has hitherto been in doubt, seems to the present writer clear. The lines are :

*Nû sol der Keiser hêre
fürbrechen durch sin êre
des lantgrâven missetât.*

Franz Pfeiffer offers this comment upon the word *fürbrechen* : "*fürbrechen* bedeutet als trans. zum Vorschein, ans Licht bringen ; hier jedoch kann der Sinn des Wortes, wenn nicht Verderbnis vorliegt, nur sein : *nachlassen, nachsehen*. Bechstein schlägt vor (Germ. XII, 476) *vergessen* " ; Wilmanns echoes this view in his edition of the poet's works, p. 364, footnote 14, where he says : *fürbrechen*, Lexer im Mhd. Wb. 3, 585 erklärt : 'herauskommen machen, offenbaren,' gegen den Sinn, wie der Zusammenhang zeigt. Wir erklärten früher unter Verweisung auf Gr. 4, 862, 868 *fürbrechen* als gleichbedeutend mit *brechen für des lantgrâven missetât*, über dieselbe hinausgehen, darüber hingehen. Paul (*Beitr.* 2, 553) wandte ein, dasz *für* keine untrennbare Verbindung mit dem Verbum eingehen könne, wie sie angenommen werden müsse, wenn der erforderliche Sinn herauskommen solle ; er verlangt, dasz man *verbrechen* lese, spricht sich aber über den Sinn nicht aus." Wilmanns then adds that *übeltât verbrechen* occurs in the *Passional* (*Hahn* S. 218, 25) with the meaning *punish* (*strafen*). But he adds that this meaning is out of place in

case of Walther's *Spruch*, and ventures the conjecture that the poet used a technical hunting term (*Weidmannswort*) here. He explains that the hunters *verbrechen* the trail of an animal, by sticking a twig into the ground, as a sign that others are to refrain from pursuing the game (cf. *Laber*, str. 69). The poet's meaning would be, then, according to Wilmanns, a plea that the Emperor should act the part of huntsman and yield no further to accusations against the Landgrave.

While this is ingenious, it is not convincing, in view of the fact that it disregards two serious difficulties. First, the mss. have *fürbrechen* not *verbrechen* ; second, the normal meaning of what the mss. contain is, at least more consonant with the situation in question than is any other thus far suggested. For Walther's zeal as a champion of Hermann is here so great that he begins his *Spruch* by a regular challenge for the Emperor to *prove* or *make clear* (*fürbrechen*) the heinousness of the Thurnigian's actions. "For," he adds at once, "he was an honorable (open, above-board) opponent."

*"Wand er was doch zewêre
sin vîent offenbêre."*

The cowards intrigued in silence. They (like the Duke of Bavaria and the Margrave Dietrich) pledged themselves by oath in all directions and plotted secret mischief. The case against them is clear ; but let the Emperor show wherein the open hostility of Hermann was anything but honorable difference of opinion. This is the argument of Walther, and in the light of it Lexer's definition of *fürbrechen* seems adequate.

Walther meets us here, not as the humble apologist for the acknowledged misdeeds of the Landgrave, but as the outspoken vindicator of his friend's integrity. The proposed interpretation bears strong incidental testimony to the independent attitude of the poet towards current politics. Its implications for the character of Walther are far more important than its bearing upon the meaning of the word *fürbrechen*.

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